

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY SEOUL

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 2979

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, ECON, SN
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR SNEIDER'S VISIT TO SINGAPORE: CONVERSATIONS
WITH PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: STATE 139361

1. AMBASSADOR SNEIDER VISITED SINGAPORE JUNE 30-JULY 2.
DURING THE COURSE OF HIS VISIT HE HAD A 45-MINUTE MEETING
WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW, MET SEPARATELY WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM, AND HAD A SUBSTANTIVE DISCUS-
SION WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/DEFENSE MINISTER GOH KENG
SWEE AT A DINNER HOSTED BY THE CHARGE.

2. THE MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE ON THE AFTERNOON
JULY 1 BEGAN WITH A BRIEFING BY AMBASSADOR SNEIDER ON
DEVELOPMENTS IN KOREA AND NORTH ASIA. LEE WAS OBVIOUSLY
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WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE GENERAL SITUATION IN AREA, CLEARLY
INTERESTED IN THE AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS, AND ASKED A NUMBER
OF PENETRATING QUESTIONS. THE SUCCESSION ISSUE IN BOTH NORTH
AND SOUTH KOREA WAS DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH, WITH THE AMBAS-
SADOR OBSERVING THAT A POSSIBLE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE IN NORTH
KOREA COULD USHER IN A DANGEROUS PERIOD. THE AMBASSADOR
EXPLAINED IN SOME DETAIL THE RATIONALE FOR U.S. TROOP WITH-

DRAWALS, NOTING THAT THE SOUTH KOREANS HAD BECOME LESS DISTURBED OVER U.S. DECISION AS THEY BETTER UNDERSTOOD ITS DIMENSIONS. LEE INDICATED THAT HE SHARED THE EVOLVING SOUTH KOREA ATTITUDE ON THIS ISSUE.

3. ASKED ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, LEE SAID "I AM SOMEWHAT LESS PESSIMISTIC NOW THAN I WAS THREE YEARS AGO." BACK IN 1968, HE NOTED, HE HAD URGED THE NON-COMMUNIST SEA COUNTRIES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TIME THE AMERICANS IN VIETNAM WERE BUYING FOR THEM TO PUT THEIR HOUSES IN ORDER. NOW THEY WERE BEING GIVEN MORE TIME BY THE VIETNAM-CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM-CHINA DISPUTES, AND THEY WOULD HAVE TO USE IT CONSTRUCTIVELY.

4. LEE SAID HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THAILAND. KRIANGSAK WAS TRYING HARD, THE MILITARY HAD AT LEAST SOME GRASP OF THE SITUATION OUTSIDE BANGKOK, BUT HE DESPAIRED OF THE BANGKOK POLITICIANS. DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA, HE CONTINUED, HAD BEEN SHOCKING. AS AN EXAMPLE OF CAMBODIA'S INTERNAL DISORGANIZATION, HE NOTED THAT THE RECENT SINGAPORE DELEGATION TO PHNOM PENH HAD BEEN FACED WITH THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO DEAL WITH A COUNTRY WHICH DID NOT EVEN USE MONEY. THE CAMBODIANS HAD BEEN INTERESTED IN IMPORTING DIESEL PUMPS, AND HAD FISH TO OFFER. "PERHAPS WE SHOULD HAVE OFFERED THEM A KILO OF PUMPS FOR A KILO OF FISH."

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5. ASKED IF HE HAD PERSONALLY MET ANY OF THE CAMBODIAN LEADERS, LEE SAID IENG SARY HAD VISITED SINGAPORE ("SITTING RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE, MR. AMBASSADOR."). LEE HAD FOUND HIM SMILING, PLEASANT, AND "OBVIOUSLY WITH NO CONSCIENCE WHATSOEVER."

6. LEE SAW THE MAIN THREATS TO NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AS INCLUDING OPEN ARMED AGGRESSION FROM THE NORTH, AN ADMITTEDLY REMOTE PROSPECT AT PRESENT; INTERNAL INSURGENCIES IN SEVERAL OF THE SEA COUNTRIES; THE ECONOMIC THREAT OF PROTECTIONISM FROM THE WEST; AND THE LONG-RANGE DESIGNS OF THE SOVIET UNION. HE EMPHASIZED THAT A CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN THE REGION--POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY-- WAS ESSENTIAL TO BALANCE THE SOVIET AND CHINESE PRESENCE AND TO PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE NON-COMMUNIST SEA COUNTRIES IN THEIR COMPETITION WITH THE COMMUNIST POWERS.

7. AMBASSADOR SNEIDER'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM ON THE MORNING OF JULY 1 COVERED SIMILAR GROUND. RAJARATNAM WAS ALSO INTERESTED IN AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS ON KOREA AND N. ASIA, ASKING A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. ON SOUTH-EAST ASIAN DEVELOPMENTS, RAJARATNAM SAID THAT THE OPTIMUM SITUATION FOR SINGAPORE WOULD BE A STATE OF PEACEFUL COMPETI-

TION BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST AND NON-COMMUNIST REGIONAL COUNTRIES. THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE, IN THEIR SEPARATE WAYS, WERE BACKING THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. RAJARATNAM HOPED THAT THE WEST--THE U.S., JAPAN, AND EEC--WOULD SIMILARLY SUPPORT ASEAN IN THIS COMPETITION. HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES COULD CONTINUE TO COMPETE SUCCESSFULLY AS LONG AS THEY COULD COUNT ON THE BACKING OF THE WEST. ONE EXCELLENT MEASURE OF HOW THE COMPETITION BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS WAS GOING, HE OBSERVED, WAS TO NOTE THE DIRECTION IN WHICH REFUGEES WERE FLOWING.

8. AMBASSADOR SNEIDER COMMENTED THAT THE APPARENT LACK OF U.S. ATTENTION TO SEA STEMMED NOT FROM ANY LACK OF INTEREST IN SEA BUT FROM PREOCCUPATION WITH CRISES ELSEWHERE IN WORLD.
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RAJARATNAM SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THIS, BUT WISHED THAT THE U.S. AND THE WEST WOULD REALIZE THAT THIS WAS ALL THE MORE REASON TO PAY ATTENTION TO SEA. WITH THE ASEAN COUNTRIES DOING REASONABLY WELL, IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR U.S. AND EUROPE TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THEM WHILE THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL RATHER THAN WAITING UNTIL THEY STARTED TO FAIL.

9. EMBASSY COMMENT: NEITHER PRIME MINISTER NOR FOREIGN MINISTER COVERED ANY PARTICULARLY NEW GROUND IN THESE TALKS, BUT BOTH PRESENTED SINGAPORE POSITION EFFECTIVELY. BOTH, IN TURN, APPEARED ENCOURAGED BY AMBASSADOR SNEIDER'S ASSURANCES OF CONTINUED U.S. INTEREST IN AREA AS WELL AS BY HIS OUTLINE OF SITUATION IN KOREA.
INGRAHAM

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